

Outsiders in Early Atlantic Canada

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REVIEWS/REVUES

Outsiders in Early Atlantic Canada

IN A POLL CONDUCTED A FEW YEARS AGO historians rated Alexis de Tocqueville's account of his observations of early 19th-century America as one of the ten most influential volumes ever written on the United States. Given the parochialism of the profession south of the border, it may seem surprising that such accolades are accorded a work produced by a gifted amateur from foreign shores. But on another level such praise is logical: the questions which de Tocqueville posed and the answers he posited remain central to an understanding of the republic. De Tocqueville's analytic strengths derived in no small measure from his ability to examine America from the perspective of an outsider. Atlantic Canada has not yet been blessed with an Alexis de Tocqueville, but some outsiders have shed fresh light on the nature of regional society, and we are fortunate to have three new additions to the collection of works by or about outsiders in 18th and early 19th-century Atlantic Canada: William Godfrey's splendid study, *Pursuit of Profit and Preferment in Colonial North America: John Bradstreet's Quest* (Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), Ronald Rompkey's edition, *Expeditions of Honour: The Journal of John Salusbury in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1749-1753* (Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1982), and Régis Brun's volume *Pionnier de la Nouvelle Acadie: Joseph Gueguen, 1741-1825* (Moncton, Editions d'Acadie, 1984). While none of these 18th-century adventurers was as perceptive or probing as de Tocqueville, each contributes valuable insights into the nature of regional society at an important formative stage.

At first glance it may seem strange to classify John Bradstreet as an outsider, since he was born and raised in Nova Scotia. Indeed, 'John-Baptiste' Bradstreet, the offspring of an Anglo-Irish military officer and an Acadian mother, combined the blood of Canada's two founding races. As such it would be logical to assume that he must have been in the mainstream of Nova Scotian society — logical, perhaps, but also an erroneous example both of Whig history and racial metaphor. During Bradstreet's life (1714-1774) Nova Scotia was solidly English in its orientation, if not always in its demography. Frightened for years by the spectre of French attack and "papist plots", English Nova Scotians, like New Englanders, expressed a strong xenophobia. As the colony became in fact more English, the distrust of anything French increased further. Bradstreet's mixed parentage branded him automatically as an outsider.

So too did his choice of career. As a colonial seeking to advance in the imperial military structure, he was forced to be, in Godfrey's apt phrase, a "man on the periphery of both worlds". His career prevented him from laying down roots, and the circumstances of his birth compounded his dilemma. Bradstreet was neither French nor English, neither British nor American. About the first set of categories Bradstreet was unambiguous, going to great lengths to disguise

his French ancestry. Still, during his career a number of allusions were made to his French blood, and while he was serving at Louisbourg some New Englanders used his parentage to question his loyalty. But about the second set of categories there is more doubt. At different times John Bradstreet could appear to be on both sides of the emerging schism between the mother country and her colonies. As Godfrey shows, Bradstreet "repeatedly used his American esteem to bolster his cause in England and employed intimations of powerful friends at home in the mother country to awe colonial critics". Lacking a primary identity, Bradstreet was very much an outsider.

Commenting upon the life of Charles XII of Sweden, William Bolitho has suggested that "the life of an adventurer is the practice of the art of the impossible".¹ Applying this observation to John Bradstreet's career we might substitute the word "improbable". Yet by any definition he lived an adventurous life. After the late 1750s he did not return to Nova Scotia, acting out his life instead on the broad stage of colonial North America. In his military guise he participated in virtually every major colonial action from the capture of Louisbourg in 1745 to the campaigns against Pontiac in 1764, winning numerous distinctions along the way. As a politician, Bradstreet most notably secured appointment as Lieutenant-Governor of Newfoundland, though he played little role in governing. He also pursued relentlessly the fruits of trade and commerce, achieving some success but also earning the opprobrium of powerful figures for his apparent inability to separate the public from the private good. From Halifax to Detroit, and from New York to St. John's, John Bradstreet was involved in a goodly proportion of the major historical events in the quarter-century preceding the American Revolution.

As Professor Godfrey shows us so effectively, Bradstreet was a scrupulous calculator of personal advantage and always attempted to collect as much available information as possible before making a decision. Unfortunately, he was not an introspective person; most of his correspondence seeks to justify rather than explain his observations and actions. Yet his biography can still tell us a good deal about the society with which he interacted. Bradstreet's rise through the ranks tells us much about one route to success in the 18th-century: the application of patronage. This was hardly unique behaviour in the Anglo-American world of the time, but because he was so assiduous in petitioning those from whom he sought assistance, Bradstreet's career provides us with perhaps the best example we currently have of the manner in which the system operated. For most of his adult life his most consistent patrons were King and Charles Gould, powerful figures in both the political and military worlds in London. But men such as William Baker (once described as "one of the foremost merchants trading with America"), Richard Lyttleton and Jeffrey Amherst were also available when called upon. In times of extreme distress, he was not above flattering men such as Thomas Gage, with whom he had pre-

1 William Bolitho, *Twelve Against the Gods* (London, 1952), p. 117.

viously had a rather stormy relationship. As Godfrey points out, Bradstreet showed "a definite ability to adjust to changing circumstances".

If Bradstreet's good fortune suggests the importance of influential allies, his inability completely to fulfill his desires suggests a further dilemma common to many others in Nova Scotia: the increasing need to walk an ever-narrower tight-rope in balancing colonial and imperial demands. Bradstreet's dilemma was of course complicated by his French blood, but the dimensions of the task and the manner in which he attempted to tackle it must also have been fairly typical for many of the "neutral Yankees" in his home colony. To attempt to maintain his position and to gain acceptance with both colonial and imperial authorities, Bradstreet was forced to channel his ingenuity into a variety of different poses. Alternately, depending upon his audience, he stressed either his American expertise or his English connections. By the 1760s, as the breach between the colonies and the mother country grew ever wider and as his own career stagnated, Bradstreet increasingly sought to curry favour with both sides simultaneously. To court Americans he became a forceful advocate of territorial expansion; to retain influence in England he counselled the need for closer imperial control over American affairs. That he may well have accepted both perspectives was a logical outcome of his life. His misfortune was that he was ignored on both sides of the ocean.

If John Bradstreet represents one particularly complex type of outsider, John Salusbury, whose journal has been reproduced along with a brief biography by Ronald Rompkey, represents another strain. As an official stationed in Halifax for most of the period 1749-1753, he shared many similarities with Bradstreet, although living a much more prosaic life. Like the General, Salusbury was passionately concerned with advancement and prestige. Similarly, he tried to use powerful patrons to bolster his career. But unlike Bradstreet, Salusbury had two fatal flaws, lack of initiative and general incompetence.

John Salusbury was an outsider to his adopted society by birth. Born in Wales in 1707, he was the eldest son of a landed family in economic decline. Although he earned an MA from Cambridge, he emerged "not only without a profession but without income". Trying a variety of occupations, including that of gigolo (perhaps the only colourful highlight in an otherwise drab life), he failed at all until he attracted the patronage of his wife's uncle, Sir John Cotton. Unfortunately, in what may be viewed as a virtual metaphor on Salusbury's life, Sir John died before he could provide any tangible assistance. Nonetheless, he was able to secure the patronage of Dr. Edward Crane, a good friend of Lord Halifax, the President of the Board of Trade. As a result Salusbury was appointed Registrar and Receiver of His Majesty's Rents in the new government that Edward Cornwallis was preparing to take out to Nova Scotia. As he arrived in Halifax harbour in the summer of 1749, John Salusbury was doubtless an embittered man. That he was a reluctant settler he made abundantly clear in letters to his wife, who remained back in England. His disappointment was further en-

hanced by the fact that he was virtually ignored by the Governor, despite his official post and his appointment to Council. It may have been his lack of energy or perhaps his desire to be elsewhere, but for whatever reason John Salusbury made few attempts to integrate himself into Halifax society. As a result he remained an outsider during his tenure in the colony.

Considering his mental state it would not have been surprising for Salusbury's journal to have reflected Baron Munchausen's famous dictum: "a traveller has the right to relate and embellish his adventures as he pleases".² Yet with a few exceptions he did not adopt that tack. Instead of trying to justify his conduct, his inertia was such that he merely wondered at his exclusion from the larger society. But whatever his weaknesses as a person, John Salusbury was a perceptive observer of the local scene, and this talent was well-recognized at home. Despite his access to a wide range of information about the state of the colony, Lord Halifax was moved to write his protégé that "the Accounts you have given me of the Country give me a perfect Idea of it".

By and large the journal is a valuable supplement to our knowledge of the formative years of the settlement. While it contains only a few observations which are unique, Salusbury's writings do provide a very new perspective on events which we know from other sources. For example, his diatribes against the increasingly powerful merchants (and their influence on the Governor) remind us that Halifax was always more than a military base. Salusbury and other officials from England may not have approved of the mercantile element, but the Lords of Trade never deviated from their intent that the town should be more than simply an outpost designed to counteract French power. Salusbury's observations that Cornwallis willingly tolerated the merchants underscore this fact.

This journalist also provides us with splendid descriptions of the tendency toward the creation of factions in the new settlement. He had little use for Hugh Davidson, the colonial secretary accused by many of being too incautious in mixing public affairs and private trade, whom he dubbed "Our Oracle". Nor did he approve of "Gay's Monkey", as he called Benjamin Green, first the Naval Officer and later the secretary and treasurer of the colony, whom he also suspected of manipulating public funds for private gain, as well as encouraging the people to form "foolish little divisions among themselves". But perhaps no individual in the town aroused Salusbury's ire as much as the Jersey-born merchant, Joshua Mauger. That Mauger came to lead the so-called "merchant's party" has often been inferred by historians from official records, but Salusbury provides us with the best view of the situation from the perspective of a contemporary. Mauger is frequently characterized as a "Rascal". While that may be a fairly mild epithet by Salusbury's standards, it is significant that he uses the same word in describing Jean-Baptiste Moreau, a former Roman Catholic priest who was employed as an assistant missionary by the Society for the Prop-

2 Rudolf Erich Raspe, *Travels of Baron Munchausen* (London, 1785), p. 3.

agation of the Gospel. By lumping the two together, Salusbury was doing no more than many others did in 18th-century Nova Scotia. But he was also reflecting a strain of anti-French feeling which was shared by many of the colonists and which would soon make it dangerous to be of French extraction in Nova Scotia.

Joseph Gueguen arrived in the New World from Bretagne in 1753, the same year in which John Salusbury bid his final farewell to Halifax. A lad of only 12, Gueguen came to join the household of l'abbé Jean Manach, a missionary to the Micmacs, first at Beauséjour and later at his headquarters in Baie Verte. Uprooted by the expulsion in 1755, Gueguen ended up not in the southern colonies or Louisiana like so many other refugees, but rather in Quebec attending a seminary. He studied in Quebec until the summer of 1758, when he and Manach returned to the Miramichi to give sustenance to a group of Acadian refugees who were struggling to survive along the coast. In January 1760 Gueguen was among the leaders of the Acadian community who formally signed the articles of submission by which they pledged allegiance to the new English control over all of Acadia. Joseph Gueguen's life re-inforces several other points already made about this era. He, too, came to appreciate the advantages of patronage and used it well, albeit in a far more limited sphere than either Bradstreet or Salusbury. With Bradstreet he shared a willingness to work to achieve his goals and his letters show a determination to defend his actions. Like Salusbury he was an acute observer of the local scene.

Although Régis Brun, Gueguen's biographer, does not dwell upon it, the capitulation of Acadia must have had a serious effect upon the young man's psyche. Certainly it taught him one thing: under English hegemony, it was best to be submissive and to play by the rules. Joseph Gueguen went on to achieve many things — he became, for example, a magistrate, notary, and businessman — but in the letters which Brun has collected (and which comprise about half of his book), the docility inculcated by this humiliation shines through clearly. Gueguen may have been a passionate defender of Acadian rights, but he was no firebrand. Instead, he worked within the system to try to redress Acadian grievances. As a francophone, Joseph Gueguen was the ultimate outsider in 18th-century Atlantic Canada. Yet his experiences demonstrate that Gueguen was an astute student of the evolving system. Though a force within his own community of Cocagne, he clearly recognized that to achieve results in interactions with the English authorities, deference was imperative. In his correspondence with English officials he demonstrated this trait to a degree which is unusual even by the stilted standards of official correspondence of the day. But if one considers the context in which Gueguen lived and worked, this deference takes on a whole new meaning. Gueguen's deference was not a result of servility but rather a rational outgrowth of his experience. Generations of anti-French historians, of course, would misread the symptoms for the cause.

What lessons can we learn from the experiences of these three outsiders in early Atlantic Canada? Some, such as the utility of patronage, are well-known

already, although personalized in the lives of these men. Others, however, are more subtle. Perhaps the most important has to do with the nature of the society which these three men observed and in which they participated. Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* portrayed a society in which an unbridgeable gap existed between the French and English realities. To comprehend the historical development of Atlantic Canada, however, requires that we consider three, rather than two, solitudes. All three of these works demonstrate that in the period prior to the American Revolution the Americans and the English distrusted each other; and both mistrusted the French. In theory the Revolution should have put an end to this, at least by removing the Americans. In fact, though, among their cultural baggage the Loyalists brought with them many of the attitudes shared over the years by the colonists, and thus the three solitudes continued to plague Atlantic Canada for many years into the future. The sheer waste engendered by these attitudes is perhaps most apparent in the case of John Bradstreet, but it is arguable that in a different society both Joseph Gueguen and possibly even John Salusbury could have made greater contributions. Just how much the maintenance of these historic solitudes has cost the region is a theme well worth exploration. The questions raised by these three outsiders may prove as important to our understanding of Atlantic Canada as de Tocqueville's observations have been for understanding the United States.

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Emigrant History and Letters Home

THE STORY OF THE EMIGRANT is familiar to all Canadians, and hence the emigrant's letters home, which offer an intimate look at the newcomer and the country of his adoption, are of general interest. The appeal made by John Millar of Spencerville, Upper Canada to his brother in Scotland expresses in poignant terms the significance of letters home to the emigrant: "I wish you to write more frequently, as it is all the communication we can have".¹

Yet any consideration of the utility of such letters for future studies of British emigration raises broader questions about emigrant history. Early works such as Helen Cowan's *British Emigration to British North America* took a narrow view of emigrant history. The field appeared to encompass little more than a general statement of why emigration occurred, an account of the journey to Canada, and an indication of the nature of the new settlement. More recently pre-Confederation emigrant history has widened significantly in scope and has

1 This quotation is taken from a letter written by John Millar to his brother James Millar in Dumfries-shire, Scotland, 29 October 1846, John Millar and Family Papers, MG24 I 167, Public Archives of Canada.